



Interview with Mrs. Sanjaya Mark, head of Junior School by Development Associate Devika Hastak

Could you talk a little about your childhood, your education and your family background?

Both my parents were teachers and I didn't want to become a teacher because just seeing how they were...mainly to see how much they put into it and how much they got in return. Then years later when I joined Woodstock, I was the principal's secretary for a while. I realised I had this love for children and enjoyed working with children and started there and started working with the children and then realised that there's nothing that can be valued or compared to the satisfaction that you get, working with children and then I understood why they were teachers.

Did your parents work at Woodstock?

No, they didn't work at Woodstock. They worked in Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sherwood College, Nainital, my father was offered the principal ship at Sherwood College

Is that where you spent most of your childhood?

I grew up in Darjeeling, in Kalimpong. I started my schooling in Sherwood College and then finished in Darjeeling. I went to a residential school, and it was a wonderful school. IT was a place where they had an exemplary boarding situation. They had small units and in fact Woodstock learnt its whole set-up of smaller units from this school in Kalimpong and they had just 30 students in a unit and the boarding curriculum in that time was something that was new to India and completely modern and a lot of it is being used at Woodstock as far as the residence curriculum goes.

How did you hear about Woodstock when you were looking for jobs?

Well, I got married to Mr [Ajay] Mark, [head of physical education] and he was working here. And that was the only reason I decided to come and work here.

How did you start working as Head of Junior School here at Woodstock?

At first I was working at the Principal's Secretary for a while and then I realised that I liked working with children. So I took a little break, and got a degree in Elementary Education, which certified me to teach children. In fact, I specialised in education for Kindergarten through 8th grade. And then I came back again to Woodstock to teach

So, what has been the best part about Woodstock so far, for you?

I think just working. I enjoy working with the children as I said the kids are great. And it's wonderful because you get colleagues from all over the world and children from all over the world. And people keep coming and going and you get so much exposure to the outside world that you don't feel like

you're stagnated. There is always something new and then also the opportunities for professional development are great. Again, you keep growing like that, and that's been the best part about Woodstock.

In consideration with your field, or the school in general, are there any goals that you have or any changes you would like to make?

Definitely. I want the Junior School to be the best Junior School in the world and now that we have a direction with the two-school model, we know exactly where we are going. So we've been working on that. It needs to be a really strong program for High School. And since we are concentrating on excellence at the moment in every area, that's my goal, excellence in every area whether it's the buildings and the grounds, the curriculum, the residences, and the kids. And just building a really strong foundation for kids going up into High School so that when they join 7th grade they are strong students.

And then the other big goal for me is that – two areas that I really want to concentrate on – one is reading. I feel that children going into High School, and High Schoolers are not reading enough. They don't have the right kind of reading skills. And if they have strong reading skills, they will be able to comprehend, use other reading skills and be able to do well in High School. And the other area that we can do much better in is extending students. Yes, we have programs for students with learning difficulties and ESL (English as a Second Language) but on the other spectrum, we have students who are really bright and we don't have a program for the gifted. Within the classroom, we have an extension program for gifted children but I think we should work on that.

Is there anything else in particular that you want to see happen for the school in general?

I think this whole two-school model has to settle down and know exactly where we're going. I'd like to see us using a strong system of benchmarking ourselves with external exams. Right now, we do checkpoint, then we do IGCSEs and then we do APs. So I think we need to align that. And our curriculum, our checkpoints, they should all be well articulated so that students are really strong in the end, whichever stream they pick up, they are really strong in that. And we can start with that in Junior School. So if we know that the end product is Advanced Placement or whatever it is, we start in Junior School with a strong program.

So finally, has your time in Woodstock taught you anything about yourself or your life in general?

Yes. It's taught me that you never stop learning no matter what age you are, you never stop growing. It's taught me that when you really pursue what you enjoy, then you always continue to keep growing and enjoying what you're doing. So I never feel bored or think, "why did I do this". Every year is different, every semester is different. Its just so motivating because its different.

The most I owe to Woodstock is that I really appreciate the way my two girls turned out. And its because of their Woodstock education. And whatever values they have, especially with their commitment to other people and other communities, beyond themselves, is because of what they picked up at Woodstock. And its not only because we made a deliberate thing here about teaching it to them through our classrooms and programs, but also because they interacted with children and staff members from all over the world, they got to know issues and they learnt that life is much bigger than India or much bigger than Mussoorie.